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Commentary from Design For Ministry™
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Wise management for one's heirs October 10, 2006

People as famous as Peter Block, and others concerned with organizational development, define stewardship as taking care of the organization so that those who follow have more with which to work.

Reading much of today's stewardship conversation among the Christian community, one gets the impression that taking care of things is understood—the phrase “wise management” usually shows up somewhere. The aspect of leaving more behind for those who follow seems altogether absent in the conversation of Christian stewardship, however. The desire to create a legacy of abundance for one's heirs—whether biological, organizational or spiritual—has been excised. In most cases wise management remains undefined. Reading between the lines, one learns the current Christian definition of wise management is to consume well or to conserve well, largely dependent on one's political views or market orientation. This consumption or conservation may occur within a religious context, but it is mostly for the sake of one's own provision rather than an endowment for one's heirs, and then mostly for instant gratification rather than sustainability.

This plays out in troubling ways. Ministry organizations frantically raise funds for their operational budget in ways that counteract the development of long-term funding relationships. Strategic relationships are pursued for selfish reasons rather than for mutual advancement. Spending is curtailed so this year's budget can be balanced, without thought for next year. Balanced budgets become more important than effectiveness of fulfilling mission or expecting successful leadership succession.

It is highly ironic that the best minds in organizational development operate with a better understanding of the end one

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must keep in mind when making stewardship decisions, than do we theologians, pastors and Christian leaders. Why should the best understanding and use of the word stewardship be preserved outside the church, rather than within the body of Christ?

-mark I vincent